

**The Report of the  
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Hillcrest High School  
7350 South 900 East  
Midvale, Utah 84047**

**March 7-8, 2011**



**Utah State Office of Education  
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**THE REPORT OF THE  
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Hillcrest High School  
7350 South 900 East  
Midvale, Utah 84047**

**March 7-8, 2011**

**UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword.....	ii
Utah State Board of Education.....	iii
Canyons School District Board of Education and District Administration .....	1
Hillcrest High School Administration and Staff.....	2
Hillcrest High School Mission Statement, Belief Statements and DRSLs.....	4
Members of the Visiting Team .....	6
Visiting Team Report.....	7
Chapter 1: School Profile.....	7
Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry.....	7
Chapter 2: Northwest Accreditation Commission (Northwest)	
Teaching and Learning Standards.....	8
Mission, Beliefs and Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSLs).....	8
Curriculum .....	9
Instruction .....	9
Assessment.....	11
Chapter 3: Northwest Support Standards.....	12
Leadership and Organization .....	12
School Services.....	13
Facilities and Finances.....	13
Chapter 4: Northwest School Improvement Standard .....	14
Chapter 5: Community Building.....	16
Chapter 6: Major Commendations and Recommendations of the Visiting Team .....	17

## **FOREWORD**

The purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase the quality of instruction and student achievement. In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes in a three-step evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, March 7-8, 2011, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Hillcrest High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Susan Malone is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Hillcrest High School and for their professional attitude which made it possible for them to see weaknesses and strengths and to suggest procedures for improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is most important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Hillcrest High School.

Larry K. Shumway, Ed.D.  
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# **HILLCREST HIGH SCHOOL**

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The purpose of the Hillcrest High School educational community is to provide an atmosphere that encourages:

- educational competency
- social responsibility
- individual ability

## **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

- Although students' abilities differ all student should accept and be accountable for their performance and behavior.
- A variety of programs should be provided both academically and socially to foster individual needs, abilities and talents.
- All teachers have a responsibility to follow the prescribed core curriculum while assisting students to learn key concepts needed for academic success.
- Education is a partnership between parents, learner, teacher and community.
- Mutual respect for self and others is essential for positive esteem and performance.
- Respect for differences in gender, culture, race, religion and abilities are essential and where disagreements exist civility in discussion should be exercised.
- Students should be accountable for their performance and behaviors. All students should have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential.
- Expect educators to competently teach curriculum and life skills necessary for life-long learning.
- All students need to be college and career ready in order to sustain themselves and their families.

## **DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)**

- Students will increase their academic performance.
- Students will increase their respect for diversity, respect for others, and recognize the contributions of various segments of the student body.
- Students will increase their development of individual talents, skills, and behaviors.
- Students will benefit from increased school communication and interaction with parents, the community, and businesses.

Date of Visit: March 7-8, 2011

## **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Rob Stillwell, Accreditation Consultant, Visiting Team Chair

Kim Baker, West Hills Middle School, Jordan School District

Roxanne Nix, South Davis Junior High School, Davis School District

Mike Smith, Olympus High School, Granite School District

Wendy Smock, South Davis Junior High School, Davis School District

## VISITING TEAM REPORT

### HILLCREST HIGH SCHOOL

#### CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Hillcrest High School, located in Midvale, opened in 1962 as part of the Jordan School District. Beginning on July 1, 2009, Hillcrest High became part of the new Canyons School District. Hillcrest High serves approximately 1,600 students from the Midvale area, representing a wide ethnic diversity.

a) *What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?*

Since the last full team visit, the school has gotten a new principal and changed districts. Both these potentially turbulent actions were conducted with transparency and the support of the community. Another large change was the retirement of 23 Hillcrest teachers in 2006, which opened the opportunity for new teachers to be hired and to add to the diversity of the staff.

b) *What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

The school has developed a comprehensive school profile. In the future, the school may decide to direct more resources to students who are neither accelerated nor remedial. Special programs address needs at both ends of spectrum, and there is a large student group in the middle that needs more attention.

c) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

The current self-study was thorough and inclusive of all stakeholders. It clearly showed a process of continuous improvement. It honestly showed areas of great accomplishment and pride, as well as areas that are works in progress. The Visiting Team validated the findings included in the self-study.

#### **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- Clearly define indicators of student progress towards DRSL implementation.

## CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NORTHWEST) TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

### Mission, Beliefs and Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSLs):

- a) *To what degree were the school's mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs developed and/or revised collaboratively by the school community to define a compelling purpose and vision for the school and to support student achievement?*

Hillcrest High School's mission statement and beliefs define a compelling purpose and vision for the school. They were revised by the faculty, parents and students in 2004. The mission statement addresses key issues that relate to student responsibilities and school expectations. The school's belief statements are comprehensive and relate to student learning.

Since the interim visit four years ago, it does not appear that there has been significant progress toward implementation or collection of data related to the DRSLs. All stakeholders should come together to clearly define what Hillcrest's desired results for student learning are, and then find a means for collecting and analyzing individual student data. While the Communication and Community DRSL is a worthy goal for teachers, staff members, the School Community Council and the PTSA, it does not directly relate to improving student learning.

- b) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's DRSLs?*

The mission statement and belief statements are succinct and supported by all stakeholders. The Visiting Team feels confident that the stakeholders will revisit the DRSLs and determine which DRSL will become institutionalized, with data collected and analyzed, before the next accreditation team visit.

- c) *Describe the indicators (measures) that have been developed to assess the school's progress in assessing the DRSLs.*

At this time, Hillcrest High School has not developed indicators that drive the school's DRSLs. The school should involve all stakeholders in creating indicators that assess the school's progress for which data could easily be collected to show improvement. There should be a shared vision for the implementation of the DRSLs.

- d) *To what extent do the school's mission, beliefs, and DRSLs guide the procedures, policies and decisions of the school, and appear evident in the culture of the school?*

Hillcrest High School has an inviting climate in which all feel welcomed and that encourages students to seek success. The Visiting Team visited with many Hillcrest students and was very impressed with the pride they demonstrated. The school staff

and teachers invite the community into the school and treat parents with sincere respect and acceptance. All stakeholders are united in maintaining the tradition of high academic achievement. The Visiting Team would encourage all the stakeholders of Hillcrest High to review the mission, belief statements, DRSLs, and action plan annually.

### **Curriculum:**

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards, the Utah Core Curriculum, reflecting the Utah Life Skills: A Guide to Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Success?*

It is clearly evident that the school has trained the teachers to incorporate Utah Life Skills into their course curricula. The Life Skills are evident in the DRSLs and are mentioned in several department analyses.

- b) *To what extent does the curriculum engage **all** students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills?*

Hillcrest offers a rigorous curriculum school-wide. The educational culture at Hillcrest High School is geared toward high expectations in the classroom. This applies not only to academics, but to relationships and behavior as well.

- c) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's DRSLs?*

Vertical teaming within departments is stronger than cross-curricular connections between departments. There are many fine examples of collaboration, but there is also room to improve across departments.

- d) *How does the staff use assessments to drive curriculum to ensure that **all** students can reach the intended learning outcomes?*

Hillcrest teachers generate, collect and report on ample data sources, both informally and formally. They use data to reach decisions. As will be seen in recommendations, there is room to improve in clearly defining DRSL indicators.

### **Instruction:**

- a) *To what extent do teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to enhance student learning?*

The Visiting Team found evidence that the teachers at Hillcrest High School are implementing a variety of learning experiences to actively engage students. Students

were engaged actively in the instructional process through classroom activities designed to last the entire class period. Instructional strategies such as lecture, direct instruction, modeling, and small and large group discussion were observed. Technology usage was also a common theme in the classroom. Most classrooms have a projector hooked to the teacher's computer for the use in PowerPoint presentations, clickers and other technology for instruction.

The Visiting Team commends the faculty members for their work with use of data to assist in guiding instruction. Many departments are consistently using common assessments to adjust instruction throughout the school year. This is a practice that could be expanded to all departments on a consistent basis. The faculty is also to be commended for maintaining high standards for learning in all courses. Additional emphasis on real-life application and relevance could be added for classes with students who struggle in core content areas, as well as for career-oriented courses.

- b) *To what extent have the school and the staff developed strategies for instruction that build the capacity for explicitly teaching the identified DRSL in every classroom?*

Hillcrest High School has done a good job of assessing the current academic needs for students. All departments use SMART goals on a yearly basis to guide instruction and pacing. A variety of coursework, in addition to numerous extracurricular groups, allows students to develop talents and skills to the best of their abilities. Class discussions and clubs facilitate open communication and respect for individuals.

- c) *To what extent is the school's professional development program guided by identified instructional needs, and how does it provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies that support student learning?*

The implementation of professional learning communities provides a structure for ongoing discussion about instructional strategies and collaboration. A late start has been implemented since the last accreditation to facilitate time for meeting with PLCs. This time is also used for students to access teachers for additional instruction, support or tutoring in any course.

- d) *To what extent are teachers proficient in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective on their own practices?*

All teachers are highly qualified for the content areas in which they teach. Time is dedicated through PLCs for teachers to analyze data and reflect on their individual needs. Teachers are required to submit a plan yearly on how they will address the needs of their students based on evidence from assessment data.

- e) *To what extent does the school effectively implement a well-defined plan for the integration of technology into its curriculum, instruction, and assessments?*

Technology at Hillcrest High is evident in all classrooms. Teachers have already embedded technology into daily classroom instruction. Some examples were seen in the use of “clicker” technology being integrated into core content areas, as well as online instructional materials to include the use of overhead LCD projectors, enhanced audio systems, DVDs, and specialized software. The Visiting Team recommends assessing computer lab usage and availability, as the school has only two full labs for class use. Students taking middle-level courses seem to have a lesser degree of access to some technology in the building.

**Assessment:**

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments with performance standards based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

The Hillcrest High staff meets regularly as department PLCs to develop and review assessments. Expectations for student performance are outlined through rubrics, modeling and other positive samples of expectations. Common assessments are used in many departments. Expectations for performance in core areas, IB and AP testing, IEP goals, and CTE are clearly communicated. The Visiting Team recommends that additional attention be paid to the middle-level classes to ensure that high standards are set and communicated.

- b) *To what extent does the school have a process to fairly and equitably assess school-wide and individual progress in achieving academic expectations?*

The Visiting Team observed that the school has implemented a systematic use of data analysis for monitoring both school-wide and individual progress. The school collects and uses disaggregated data to guide programming and instruction to close achievement gaps among various populations.

- c) *To what extent does the professional staff use data to assess the success of the school in achieving its academic expectations?*

The Visiting Team found that the professional staff uses data on an ongoing basis to assess the success of the individuals and the school in their quest for academic success. This is obvious from the data collected and included in the accreditation report. The data was also disaggregated in such a way that particular subgroups in need of additional assistance would be noted. Additional use of data from common assessments collected during the school year would also be useful in tailoring individual instruction during the school year.

- d) *To what extent does the school’s professional development program allow for opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies?*

Hillcrest High utilizes professional development for collaboration, data analysis, and developing common curriculum and assessments. Assessments range from informal use of white boards to check for understanding during instructional time to round-table discussion where students must use specific examples to defend their answers. High levels of understanding and evaluation of curriculum are expected.

- e) *To what extent is there organizational agreement on the use of a school-wide scoring tool to assess the identified DRSL?*

The individual departments at Hillcrest High use SMART goals designed with benchmarks to assess progress in meeting goals. The Visiting Team recommends an increase in whole-faculty and staff understanding of school-wide indicators of success for measurement of the DRSLs.

### **CHAPTER 3: NORTHWEST SUPPORT STANDARDS**

#### **Leadership and Organization:**

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate that actively supports teaching and learning?*

The Visiting Team has observed a positive school culture. Reward systems have been used to promote and acknowledge strong student and teacher achievements. As an example, “Husky Grams” are used by students, teachers, and administrators alike to note even small improvements. It is recommended that all teachers also receive continued support and acknowledgement of strengths and achievements throughout the school year.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative to monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness?*

Hillcrest High uses mixed methods to collect data from many school stakeholders. Use of parent, student, staff surveys, as well as focus groups and other data sources, has added to the wealth of information that can be drawn upon to make decisions. The Visiting Team recommends that the school further analyze the data that has been collected.

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and allocation and use of resources at*

*the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment which aligns with the school goals, DRSLs, and school improvement?*

The Visiting Team has found that operations and policies are in alignment with the school goals and mission statement. Instructional time seems to be valued to maximize student learning. Allocation of human resources is effective. The Visiting Team found an atmosphere in which students and teachers are able to focus on their respective goals.

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the entire school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning through meaningful roles in the decision-making process?*

Many stakeholders are involved in the school decision-making processes. Teachers have completed amazing work with data collection in their PLC department groups with data collection. Parents have been included in focus groups and surveys, and interpreters have been provided to the community to help engage parents in school events. Overall, The Visiting Team has found that Hillcrest High has a working, respectful relationship with its local community.

- e) *To what extent has the school established a formal system through which each student has an adult staff member who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning?*

Hillcrest High should be commended for its efforts with IB, AP, struggling, and ethnic minority students. These students seem to feel that their academic achievement and growth are of strong concern. It has been found that students who are in the academic middle need more attention. The Visiting Team spoke with several students who feel that many “regular students” are left out of the push to self-improve.

### **School Services:**

This standard is dealt with in the school’s NAAS Annual Report, which requires specific responses and information regarding student support services, guidance services, health services, library information services, special education services, and family and community services.

### **Facilities and Finances:**

This standard is addressed in the school’s annual report to Northwest, which requires specific responses regarding the physical plant, finances, audit of school records, advertising, etc.

## CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STANDARD

### **Culture of Continual Improvement:**

- a) *To what extent has the school developed and implemented a comprehensive school improvement plan using Collaborating for Student Achievement, the Utah accreditation/school improvement process, that is reviewed and revised on an ongoing basis?*

Hillcrest High School has implemented a comprehensive improvement plan centered on the DRSL “Students will increase their academic performance.” This is evidenced through data showing increases in student learning, classroom learning activities and assessments observed by the Visiting Team, independent departmental SMART goals centered on student learning gains, and discussions in learning communities centered around individual student learning.

Hillcrest High School’s comprehensive school improvement plan is missing its next steps (beyond 2011), and it is suggested that the school create a longer-term plan that includes the data required by the district office, but is multi-year and next-step-based.

- b) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through an aligned and ongoing professional development plan focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

Hillcrest High School has engaged a professional learning community model for ongoing job-embedded professional development. Teachers participate in learning community teams two mornings each week, and are actively engaged in creating common benchmarks, reviewing student learning, learning about new programs and initiatives, and implementing those new learning communities.

The departmental SMART goals drive and coordinate the learning activities for each department’s learning community activities. The SMART goals are aligned with the high school DRSLs. This is evidenced by departmental SMART goals included in the self-study, study team minutes provided to the principal, and the conversations of Visiting Team members with individual faculty members who participate in learning community teams.

- c) *To what extent is the new/revised school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up and is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?*

Because Hillcrest High School’s action plan is centered on the SMART goals created by the individual departments, the individual teachers have a high degree of commitment to the accomplishment of these goals. Teachers have increased their

support of the continuous learning process and professional learning communities through participation in the team activities.

The increase in support for the continuous learning process creates confidence in the school's and system's long-term improvement focused on increasing student learning. It is suggested that the school investigate the imbalance of the comprehensive improvement plan, and include more of an emphasis on other DRSLs.

- d) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

The late-start morning professional development time provided on Tuesdays and Thursdays is job-embedded, consistent and team-based time that engages the teachers in a continuous learning environment that supports productive change. Teachers reported to the Visiting Team that the school's administration supports with time and financial resources the continuous improvement activities at the high school.

- e) *What significant progress has been made in implementing the original action plan since the last full visit?*

The original action plan was changed the following year, and has been continually adjusted to fit the needs of the school community. Each new innovation or improvement has been implemented, and the actions completed.

It is suggested that the overriding school improvement plan be written in such a way that progress can be measured over a period of years toward the completion of the DRSLs, based on indicators that measure the improvement process. This may include a measurement plan that focuses on student learning gains in all areas.

- f) *What significant progress has the school made in addressing the **major** recommendations of the previous Visiting Team and/or review team?*

Hillcrest High School is to be commended for the amount and use of data throughout the school. Visiting Team members witnessed teachers using data in their classrooms and teacher teams using data to create SMART goals within departments, and the self-study report includes a wide representation of important and diverse lines of data.

It is suggested that the school maintain the collection and use of data throughout the school community, including an annual collection of school learning data and a narrative sharing of the analysis and findings based on the data.

Hillcrest High School is also to be commended for addressing some of the cultural and minority issues within the stakeholder groups. The creation of a Latinos in Action group has provided an avenue for ethnic minority students to provide service, gain confidence and learn important skills to become productive members of society.

It is recommended that the school continue to build bridges to connect the minority and at-risk populations within the school community.

## **CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING**

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

The group Latinos in Action works very hard to establish relationships between the community and the school. This includes volunteering at elementary schools to tutor ELL students; making phone calls to parents about upcoming events, including inviting all Latino parents to parent-teacher conferences; and performing translation services at parent-teacher conferences.

The performing arts and athletic teams continue to connect with parents and the community through booster clubs and participation opportunities. The School Community Council and PTSA groups are very high-functioning and represent a good cross-section of the Hillcrest community. These groups review student learning data and assist in decision-making activities within the school.

The late start time allows for teachers to build strong working relationships both within their departments or teaching areas and across the curriculum, creating multiple bonding relationships beyond normal school relations.

Hillcrest High School is to be commended for being proactive with parent communication through a multifaceted approach including letters, e-mail notifications, phone calls from the school and teachers, newsletters and other electronic and non-electronic mediums.

- b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

The IB program connects a part of the school community with a strong collaborative network that supports student learning through year 16. The counselors communicate with colleges, technical centers, and universities and share the information they gather with students and parents.

- c) *To what extent has the school engaged the school community in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

Hillcrest High School is to be commended for its use of teachers and administration in the collaborative self-study process, particularly in the continued biannual study and collection of departmental analyses.

Hillcrest High School involved parents and students in various focus groups. The School Community Council continually receives data about student learning from the school and individual departments.

It is recommended, as the school creates a longer-term action plan for student learning, that **all** stakeholder groups be engaged in the creation and approval process.

d) *How are results of school improvement identified, documented, used, and communicated to all stakeholders?*

Hillcrest High School continually shares data about student learning gains with the School Community Council. This sharing includes individual departments, etc. Student learning gains are celebrated through assemblies, newspaper articles, newsletters and announcements from the school.

It is recommended that the Visiting Team Report be shared with all stakeholder groups, and these groups are consulted in the creation of next steps in the school improvement efforts.

## **CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

### **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends Hillcrest High School for the leadership and vision of Principal Susan Malone and her administrative team.
- The Visiting Team commends Hillcrest High School for the professionalism and dedication of the faculty and staff.
- The Visiting Team commends Hillcrest High School for reaching out to minority students by providing opportunities for them to participate in the many positive aspects of the school. The Latinos in Action group, with its community service projects, is exemplary.
- The Visiting Team commends Hillcrest High School for the clean, orderly, positive and safe learning environment provided for its students.
- The Visiting Team commends Hillcrest High School for the high degree of student participation in clubs and extracurricular activities.
- The Visiting Team commends Hillcrest teachers for the wide variety of strategies and assessments used in the classroom to enhance student learning.

**Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that Hillcrest High School define measureable indicators of student performance for all DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Hillcrest High School consider changing its fourth DRSL—“Students will benefit from increased school communication with parents, the community and businesses”—to a belief statement. It is a best practice in which the school believes, but it is not an indicator of student learning.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Hillcrest High School reinstate school professional development days to meet school needs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Hillcrest High School write action plans for monitoring student progress on achieving DRSLs that include next steps and are updated when completed.